

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

VOLUME XXII

ASHLAND, O., THURSDAY, JULY 5, 1900.

No. 26

Theology of the Communion Service

The first of the series of Eight Booklets is now ready for delivery and will be mailed at once to all advanced subscribers. For particulars as to price and future issues see page 14 of this paper.

"Theology of the Communion Service," the title of the first number of the series, now ready for delivery, is by Rev. B. C. Moomaw, and that in itself is sufficient to assure its merit. The author has given years of study to this subject and writes with authority. It is written in elegant style, and will hold the attention of the reader from beginning to end whether he feels any special interest in the subject treated or not. It is not all argumentative nor all devotional, but a successful and happy combination of both in a proportion that shows rare ability and tact in the treatment of a subject of this kind. The author treats the Communion Service as one connected whole, showing that the several parts of the service bear a vital and inseparable relation to each other. While each part is distinct, it is incomplete in itself, and disassociated from the others, loses its beauty as well as its meaning. We quote from the introduction the following :

The spirit of humblé, loving, unquestioning obedience to the will of the Master in all things, which characterized the first Christians, and to which let us trust that there are many signs of a universal retuning, impelled them to follow the example of the Lord minutely, and to obey without hesitation even the least hint of his will. So when he said to them : "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you," it was enough for the love of these simple disciples who had not yet learned the nice distinctions between essential and non-essential, or the subtleties of a speculative theology.

This shows the spirit of the book. The author gives what he regards as the only sincere objection which has been urged against the feast of fellowship and the service of cleansing as parts of the communion service. We quote again :

However unimportant or even trivial a plain literal injunction may appear to our human understanding, two principles are involved which are neither trivial nor unimportant : First, Faith, absolute faith, both in the infinite wisdom and the infinite love of the Lord. Second, Submission of our will to God's will.

This, it seems to us, is admirably stated, and again shows the spirit of the author thru out the entire booklet. The ceremony of footwashing the author is pleased to designate as "The Ceremony of Cleansing," and as such he treats it with all the regard and the reverence that a plain command of the Lord deserves. "Ceremony of Cleansing," as we look at it, is peculiarly fitting and a happily chosen designation. From the opening paragraph we quote :

Beginning with the ceremony of cleansing, we will call attention to the rather remarkable fact that no other ordinance, precept or duty was set forth with such earnest and repeated emphasis. Not even the sacrament of baptism, or of the Lord's Supper, was so elaborately and emphatically enforced as this one which the churches have neglected.

In the treatment of this part of the Communion Service the author lays down two great principles which are at once the foundation of and the motive for the institution of this ordinance,—The Social Law of the Kingdom, and second,—The Spiritual Law of the Kingdom. Here again the author shows peculiar fitness and skill in bringing the lessons of the Ceremony of Cleansing under two happily chosen divisions. We have space for but a few words from the former :

It would not be difficult to perceive that if the Master's teaching by this remarkable figure was today in full force and effect thru-out all the churches, that there would no longer be any question of reaching and leavening that great body of humanity commonly referred to as the masses, the multitudes who are to be found in the humbler walks of life, but not in the ways of the church.

The author prefers to call the Lord's Supper as it is usually designated, the "Christian Passover." Just why he prefers to give it this name is not expressly stated tho one may infer from the reading of the chapter on that subject. After making scriptural as well as historical reference to the feast, showing that for the first four centuries of the Christian era this sacred meal was observed by the Christian church, he speaks of its meaning as a part of the Communion Service, from which we quote the following :

It is the divinely appointed symbol of Fellowship and Brotherly love ; and in adopting it, our Lord, as was often his manner, adapted a universal idea to the special service of the Church. To break bread together, or eat at the same board, is everywhere a sign of concord, of agreement, of fraternal love, of brotherhood, and the self same sign was transplanted into the Church, and by our Lord's appointment and blessing was made the holy and perpetual symbol of Christian Fellowship. . . . As there could be no fellowship of a Christian Brotherhood without purity and unselfishness, so there could be no Communion without fellowship. One is a fitting prelude to the other ; and thus the first two ordinances of the Communion Service prepare us for, lead us up to, and culminate in the Eucharist.

Then follows the last chapter, the "Eucharist," to which the concluding words of the former chapters are a most fitting prelude. The closing chapter beautifully sets forth the significance of this whole service, showing how the Lord has joined together its several parts, and how appropriately each fits in its place, and without which the whole service would be marred. In the concluding paragraph the author says : "The above interpretation of the Communion service as a whole removes from it that legal or contract aspect with which it is often invested, and leaves full room for the widest and liveliest exercise of an intelligent faith. In this view we can worship God in these sacraments 'with the spirit and with the understanding,' for, rising above the literal command, and as it were illuminating it with a heavenly glory, we see the divine reason, the logical arrangement, and the spiritual purpose of the ordinances which the Lord has adapted at once to our understanding, and to our greatest spiritual need."

On the whole it is an excellent beginning for the series. Others will follow in order as the manuscript is received. That of Rev. J. L. Gillin on "Jesus and Society" is in hand now and will be issued soon.